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ABSTRACT

.This booklet profiles seven participants in Colorado adult literacy and basic skills education programs and describes the effects that participating in literacy and adult basic education have had on participants, their families, and their communities. The first profile illustrates the positive effects that parents' participation in literacy and basic skills education can have on their children's social and educational development. The next three profiles demonstrate how participation in literacy and basic skills education can help individuals achieve citizenship, find success in the workplace, and find employment and participate in community activities despite their disabilities. In the final three profiles, past participants in literacy and basic skills education share their views regarding what their educational experiences have meant to their individual development, self-esteem/self-confidence, family life, and ability to cope with health problems. (MN)

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P O R T R A I T S

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The problem

23% – or some 44 million – American adults are functionally illiterate

Colorado's solution

Colorado Literacy and Adult Basic Skills Education

DIAN BATES
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
OFFICE OF ADULT EDUCATION

Adult illiteracy is a problem that has far-reaching consequences. It erodes the confidence and performance of the individual, the family, the community, the state, and the nation. Its intergenerational effects are self-perpetuating. The cycle must be broken.

The problem of adult illiteracy has a solution. In Colorado, the solution is recognized and in place: Colorado literacy and adult basic skills education.

Statistics verify that literacy and adult basic skills education programs work. Accountability demands more, though, than numbers. The real measure of effectiveness is in how this educational process has improved the quality of individual lives, strengthened family unity, and increased workforce productivity.

We bring you *Portraits*, a publication spotlighting people whose lives have been positively changed through self-determination, the support of Colorado literacy and adult basic skills education programs, and the encouragement of local business, social, and civic collaborators, whom we feel privileged to call partners in the war against illiteracy.

Dian Bates

DIAN BATES

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family

COLORADO LITERACY & ADULT BASIC SKILLS EDUCATION IN THE FAMILY

COMMUNITY PARTNER
JACK DOAK
MARKETING DIRECTOR
KON OFFICE SOLUTION, INC.
DENVER, COLORADO

"Children whose parents lack basic literacy skills fall behind their peers by two or more grades. Soon, they become the next generation of parents lacking these skills, and the cycle continues. The Adult Learning Source is a program devoted to family literacy. These programs are vital if we are to break this vicious cycle of poor, or no, literacy skills in the family."

When Nigeria Adams entered Denver's Adult Learning Source (A.L.S.) she was 19, unemployed, a single mother of two, and without a high school diploma. A year and a half later, she had her G.E.D., her first job, and was on her way to becoming a computer specialist. She had also become a better parent.

At the beginning of her involvement in the program, Nigeria's son Deion was having difficulties adjusting to his preschool environment. He didn't play well with his classmates. Because of this, Nigeria was reluctant to participate in Parent and Child Together (P.A.C.T.) activities, but personal drive and the will to succeed—for herself and for her children—kept Nigeria on track. Then she began to see results.

By the time she earned her G.E.D. (November 1995), Nigeria and her children were "star" participants. Today she is able to spend more quality time with Deion and his younger brother G'kar.

"A.L.S. has taught me to calm down and take a look at the situation before reacting. I have become a better listener. Now I read more to my children, and they listen to me. They pick out the stories and we read together."

Nigeria has also been selected to appear on Channel 6's "Parenting Works," which profiles families and highlights child-rearing issues. Currently, she is attending a computer class at Tec East while her children are cared for on the Clayton Campus.

Nigeria is determined to complete her training and set an example for Deion and G'Kar that will have positive and lasting effects.

1,519 Coloradans moved from literacy and adult basic education classes into employment in 1995.

"I have learned that once I put my mind to it, I can achieve it, and my children will learn that from me."

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citizenship

COLORADO LITERACY & ADULT BASIC SKILLS EDUCATION & CITIZENSHIP

COMMUNITY PARTNER
SENATOR TOM NORTON
PRESIDENT OF THE STATE SENATE
GREELEY, COLORADO

"My hope is that many more of our citizens can achieve their goals with the wonderful assistance offered by this kind of program."

When Mary Stoner met her husband in Mexico 20 years ago, she spoke only Spanish, and he spoke only English. Since then, Mary has been working on improving her English-language skills. Mary began working with Gertrude, her Right to Read volunteer tutor, in 1993. On July 29, 1994, Mary called Gertrude to say she had passed all the tests and was now a naturalized U.S. citizen. A week later, she registered to vote. When Mary voted in her first election, Gertrude claimed Mary probably knew more about the issues than she did!

Gertrude and Mary were neighbors. When Mary began talking about applying for U.S. citizenship, Gertrude, a trained volunteer, willingly offered to help. The pair studied U.S. history, government, reading, writing, and math. As Mary studied, her confidence grew, and soon she began working as a crossing guard for her children's school. When it finally came time to be interviewed by the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Mary was ready.

After gaining her citizenship, Mary proudly wrote to her state senator. She received a proclamation from the Colorado Legislature and a letter from Senate President Tom Norton. In it he commended Mary and the program that had helped her.

Now that her children are all in school full time, Mary has begun working at Northern Colorado Medical Center and continues working with the Right to Read Program. Her next goal is to obtain her G.E.D. For a learner with a sixth-grade education in another language, this may seem a lofty goal, but when that learner is Mary Stoner, it seems very possible.

65 Colorado literacy and adult basic education students became citizens and 118 registered to vote for the first time in 1995.

"After being a legal alien for 20 years, on July 29, I became a naturalized U.S. citizen. A week later I exercised my privilege as a citizen, and registered to vote."

workplace

COLORADO LITERACY & ADULT BASIC SKILLS EDUCATION IN THE WORKPLACE

COMMUNITY PARTNER
JOHN TROTTER
DIRECTOR OPERATIONS
COORS CERAMICS
GRAND JUNCTION, COLORADO

"Businesses are continually trying to improve processes to make a better product. These new procedures are in written form, so employees' literacy becomes even more essential to a business's success."

COMMUNITY PARTNER
JANET COMERFORD
MANAGER ADMINISTRATION
COORS CERAMICS
GRAND JUNCTION, COLORADO

"As an employer, it is in our best interest to invest in and support programs that promote literacy and basic skills training. Literacy is good business and the foundation for personal and professional success."

7,354 Coloradans earned their G.E.D.s in 1995.

Rosie Cloud worked for Coors Ceramics in Grand Junction when she began her studies with the Mesa County Public Library District Adult Reading Program (A.R.P.). She needed to get her General Equivilency Diploma (G.E.D.) in order to stay with Coors, and she also wanted to learn more about American culture. Seven years later, Rosie has her G.E.D. and is one of Coors' most valuable employees. Shipping highly technical products to thousands of customers all over the world, she is responsible for millions of dollars' worth of goods.

Rosie was born in Vietnam, then moved to the United States in 1975. She dropped out of high school because she was reading at less than a fifth-grade level. Lack of cultural knowledge played a large part in her language difficulties. Rosie later worked with an A.R.P. volunteer tutor almost nonstop for two years. In that time, her reading level improved dramatically, enough to allow her to pass the G.E.D., with reading sections ranging in level from ninth- to twelfth-grade.

Dennis Wooters, Rosie's supervisor (pictured with her, opposite) says, "To compete in the workplace takes knowledge and the ability to communicate. Through hard work, dedication and the help of A.R.P., Rosie was able to identify and obtain the skills that she needed to reach her goals. Rosie has become a major contributor to the success of Coors Ceramics Company."

Rosie, in turn, greatly appreciates Coors' role in her learning process: "I work for a very good company. They didn't look down on me when I started the program. They encouraged me to learn and gave me great support."

When asked what she values most about having worked with an A.R.P. tutor, Rosie says, "I have a lot of confidence in dealing with people. If you have confidence, you can do so much more."

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"If you have confidence,
you can do so much more."

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community

COLORADO LITERACY & ADULT BASIC SKILLS EDUCATION IN THE COMMUNITY

COMMUNITY PARTNER
BARBARA STROMBECK
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
UNIVERSITY PARK CARE CENTER

COMMUNITY PARTNER
SUSAN MCCLENDON
ACTIVITIES COORDINATOR
UNIVERSITY PARK CARE CENTER

"We believe the literacy program provides a wealth of opportunity in the field of education. It's a very worthwhile program and we encourage participation."

14,851 Coloradans were assisted by literacy and adult basic education programs in 1995

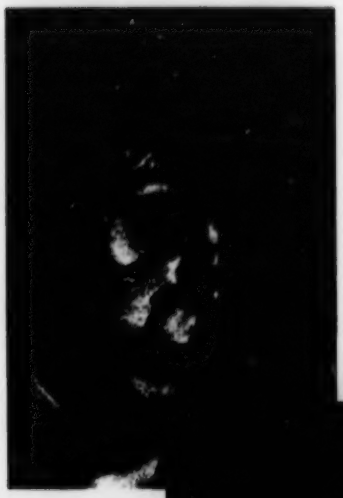
John Sanchez contracted infantile paralysis when he was two years old. Although it left him in a wheelchair, it didn't stop him from working to reach his full potential. John and his wife Mary wanted to improve employment possibilities with a G.E.D. and to assist their children in school. This led them to enroll in Pueblo Community College's Adult Basic Education Program. A love of service led them to turn their talents and gifts back toward the community.

Married for 18 years, they have three children: Christopher 17, Elizabeth 15, and Jonathan 12. As a result of Mary and John's ongoing education, each of their children's grades have improved and the whole family has a better sense of unity that extends into the community.

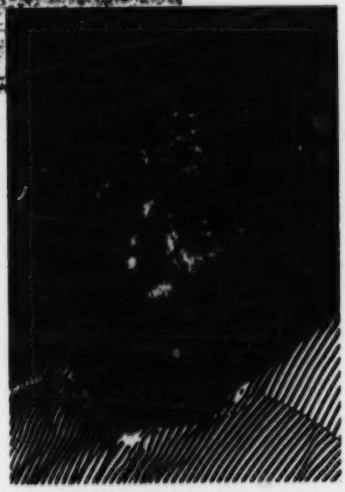
John plays keyboard and his eldest son Christopher plays guitar. Together father and son entertain at nursing homes, like the University Park Care Center, and at other community functions. This and similar experiences have fostered community awareness in all the Sanchez children.

John and Mary have been outstanding role models as well. John delivered mail to five floors in a nursing home and served as a drug and alcohol counselor. Mary prefers to focus her skills on the home. She offers her support in quiet ways, serving as the family organizer and driving the family van.

The Sanchez family makes an impressive contribution to their community, through the family's commitment to each other, to learning, and to service. "Now we understand better what we're reading. That leads to independence and independence has opened a lot of doors for us." It also has enriched their lives on a personal level, as Mary points out: "Now, when we take a walk to the park, we talk about the future and make plans."



"Now, when we take a walk to the park,
we talk about the future and make plans."



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individual

COLORADO LITERACY & ADULT BASIC SKILLS EDUCATION & THE INDIVIDUAL

COMMUNITY PARTNER
JOYCE WHIDDEN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
NEW BRIDGES INC.
FORT COLLINS, COLORADO

"Many of our clients are victimized as the result of their limited level of education. Without a high school diploma or a G.E.D., a person's chances of obtaining long-term employment that pays a living wage are minimal. Literacy is an essential ingredient in the quest for self-sufficiency."

145 Colorado literacy and adult basic education students moved off of public assistance in 1995

When Tim Brooks began his studies with the Adult Basic Education Program at New Bridges, Fort Collins, in 1995, he was 46 years old, disabled, and homeless. Tim has now passed all five of the required tests and earned his G.E.D. He has a full time job, a place to live, and is saving money to buy a car. In addition, he is taking college classes.

Brooks, a Vietnam veteran, suffered an injury in 1994. Lengthy hospitalizations and a permanent disability interfered with his ability to find work. Living solely on his disability income, Tim found himself sleeping on the street. He realized that in order to find work in a new field, he needed to complete his G.E.D. and continue his education. Tim enrolled in the New Bridges Adult Basic Education Program, a program coordinated and funded by Front Range Community College. "Time and circumstances came together: I knew I had the ability and someone showed they cared and encouraged me to move toward my goal."

Though he uses a crutch to aid mobility, Tim travels on foot or by bus. He did not allow his disability to slow him down, attending the program in all types of weather. In addition, he initiated friendships with other students to share knowledge and enhance each other's learning experiences. Tim's advice was and is to "keep going; stay focused; set priorities; go in steps."

The confidence and self-esteem that came from completing his G.E.D. are the most important gains for Tim. "I feel like I have found who I am again, and it reminded me of the inner strength we all have to fight our problems and come out on top. Limits are gone. Movement is possible, if I choose it."

"I feel like I have found who I am again, and it reminded me of the inner strength we all have to fight our problems and come out on top. Limits are gone. Movement is possible, if I choose it."

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education

COLORADO LITERACY & ADULT BASIC SKILLS EDUCATION & EDUCATION

COMMUNITY PARTNER
LISA GESNER
BOULDER BOOK STORE
BOULDER, COLORADO

"Booksellers are passionate about reading and books, so it makes sense that we would support a literacy program like the Learning to Read Program at Boulder Public Library. Seeing the lives of people significantly changed for the better is the reason we believe that support of LTRP benefits our entire community. We think the partnership between Boulder Book Store and LTRP is what the word community is all about, as well as what socially responsible business is all about."

1,737 Colorado trained volunteers contributed 131,612 hours to literacy and adult basic education students in 1995.

Despite obtaining a high school diploma, Corinthia Turner had difficulty reading. Two years after joining the Learning to Read Program in Boulder, Corinthia enrolled in the cosmetology program at Boulder Tech. She not only completed that program on schedule, once being named Student of the Month, but also reached another important goal: she was able to take and pass tests for school. She passed the cosmetology board exam as well as the barber board exam and is now working at a salon in Boulder — a lifelong dream.

At different times in her life, she had tried reading programs. None of them worked for her because they were either classroom settings where she was intimidated, or environments that offered little support. However, after working two months with a volunteer tutor at the Learning to Read Program, she passed the driver's license written test.

Thinking back to that day, Corinthia says, "I knew I had a problem taking tests but my tutor went with me which made me calmer." She then began to discover the joy of reading and completed her first book and magazine article.

Corinthia credits the Learning to Read Program with helping her reach her goals. When she refers to earning her cosmetology license, she points out how difficult the test was: "I didn't realize at first how much I had to learn about nerves and muscles. I didn't think I could keep it all straight. My tutor gave me confidence that I could learn it and pass the test."

In addition, she feels that improving her reading has led to a growth in self-esteem and confidence in business and personal relationships. "Last week I helped my granddaughter read a book, and I realized that just a couple of years ago I couldn't have read it myself!"

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"Last week I helped my granddaughter read a book, and I realized that just a couple of years ago I couldn't have read it myself!"

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health

COLORADO LITERACY & ADULT BASIC SKILLS EDUCATION & HEALTH CARE

COMMUNITY PARTNER
DR. WILLIAM ROBINSON
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO
HEALTH SERVICES
DENVER, COLORADO

"Language barriers make medicine much more difficult to practice. Explaining the nature of the disease, especially when it is a potentially fatal illness, can become an overwhelming task."

Imagine learning you have brain cancer. Imagine not being able to speak English. How will you ask questions about your condition? Your immediate medical needs? Your hope for the future? And how will you understand the answers even if you can find a way to phrase the questions? That's what happened to Frida Villavicencio, shortly after she moved to the United States from Peru. Now, four years later and having undergone surgery, Frida is in good health. Having also attended English as a Second Language classes at the Adult Literacy Network in Colorado Springs, Frida can ask questions and understand answers related to a wide range of health and nutrition issues.

In fact, she does that so well, her oncologist Dr. William Robinson of University of Colorado Health Services in Denver encouraged her to become a translator for other patients in the same position she once was. Without a shared language, Dr. Robinson points out, "It's difficult to create a relationship when social, cultural, and personal nuances are lost on both sides through lack of direct communication."

Frida agrees: "Four years ago I spoke no English. I had to go to the doctor with an interpreter or get my husband to interpret. Sometimes he would enlarge the problem, sometimes make nothing of the problem. Now I don't need company when I go to the doctor."

The benefits of speaking the language of her community serve her in other areas as well: "I study English because I want to read books with my kids and help them with their homework. I am also studying to become a nurse. Language is the most important thing when you are caring for people."

4,125 Coloradans participated in E.S.L. classes through literacy and adult basic skills education programs in 1995.

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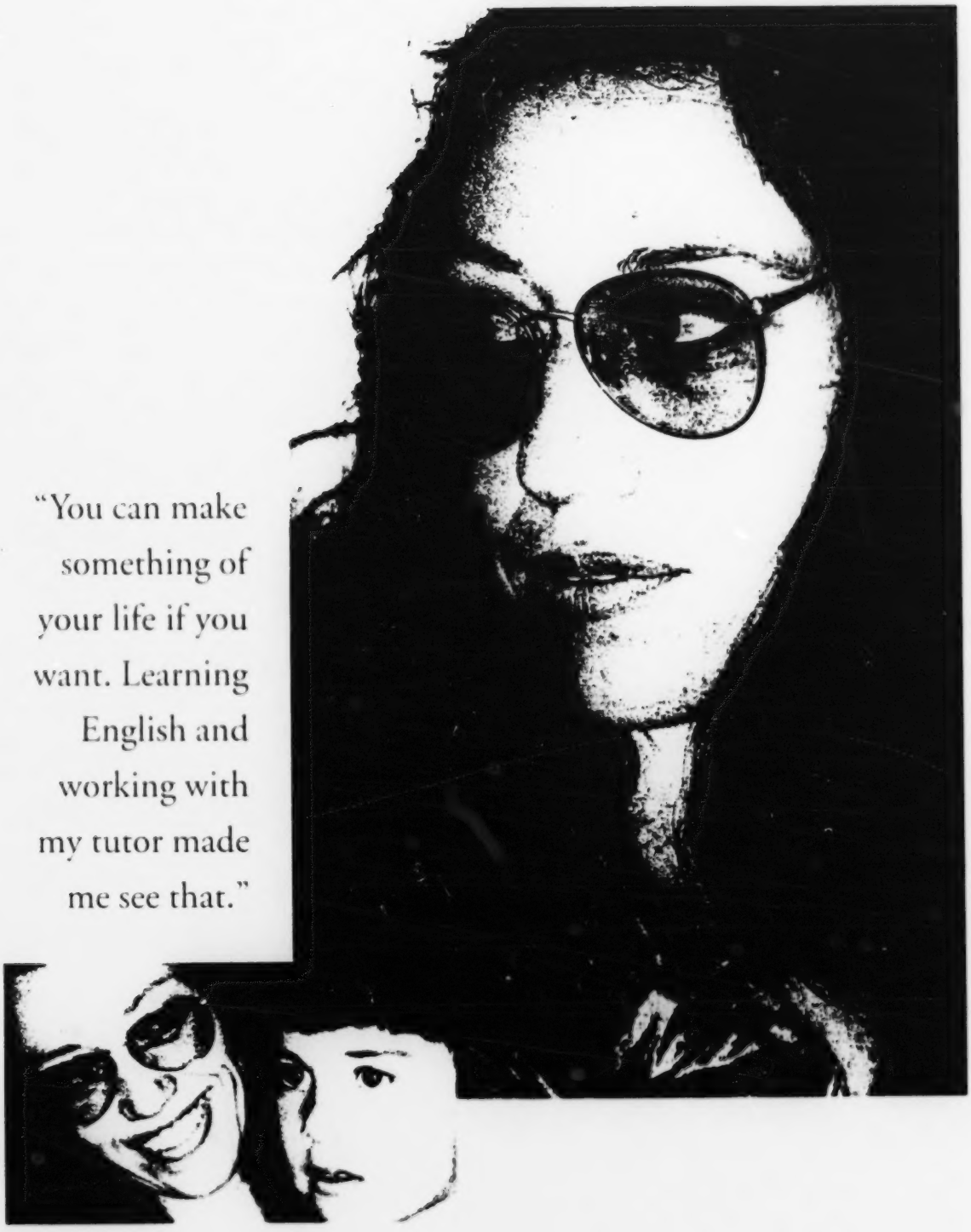

"You can make something of your life if you want. Learning English and working with my tutor made me see that."

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Title page statistic taken from Adult Literacy in America: A First Look at the Results of the National Adult Literacy Survey. *National Center for Education Statistics. September 1993.*

Unless noted, all other statistics come from the Colorado Department of Education, Office of Adult Education Annual Performance Report for Adult Education Programs, 1995.

For more information about adult literacy or basic skills education call any of the providers listed below:

ADULT LEARNING SOURCE
Denver, Colorado
(303) 394-2166

ADULT LITERACY NETWORK
Colorado Springs, Colorado
(719) 637-3640

BOULDER PUBLIC LIBRARY
Learning to Read Program
Boulder, Colorado
(303) 444-5599

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Denver, Colorado
(303) 866-6609

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